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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S WHO BID

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage May 15 on Taiwan's setback in its bid to join the World Health Organization (WHO); on the new cabinet to be headed by Straits Exchange Foundation Chairman Chang Chun-hsiung; and on the island's Han Kuang No. 23 military exercise. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an analysis in the pro-status quo "China Times" said U.S. Secretary of Health and Services Mike Leavitt dealt a heavy blow to Taiwan by saying publicly that he does not support Taiwan's application for full membership in the WHO, and that he will not meet with Taiwan's WHO delegation this year. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" raised the question as to how long the WHO will continue to hold out against membership for Taiwan. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News," on the other hand, said Taiwan's new gambit this year "has succeeded in pulling the authoritarian People's Republic of China into open and direct competition with 'democratic Taiwan' in the arena of public diplomacy." End summary.

A) "U.S. Secretary of Health and Services Slaps Taiwan Twice in the Face"

Washington correspondent Liu Ping noted in an analysis in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (5/15):

"As a result of the big gap between Taiwan's plan to participate in or enter the World Health Organization and the United States' position toward the issue, the island has little expectation that Washington will speak in favor of Taiwan, but neither does it hope that Washington would speak up against its bid. To everyone's surprise, U.S. Secretary of Health and Services Mike Leavitt, the U.S. top representative [to the WHO], dealt a heavy blow to Taiwan during the press conference on the first-day session of the World Health Assembly. Leavitt's 'heavy blow' actually consisted of two aspects: First, he announced publicly that '[Washington] does not support Taiwan's application for formal membership in the WHO. Second, Leavitt is scheduled to leave Geneva Tuesday, and he said clearly that there will not be any routine meeting between him and the ROC delegation this year. These various moves by Leavitt were akin to foretelling [before the world] that the United States will cast a vote against [Taiwan's membership] during the assembly. In particular, Leavitt said prior to the assembly session that he has 'conveyed the U.S. position to his Chinese counterpart Gao Qiang.' Leavitt could have chosen not to tell Gao about it. His insistence in saying so was naturally a move to make the U.S. position clear to Beijing; it also indicated Washington's displeasure with Taiwan's 'surprises.' ..."

B) "Taking East Germany's Path to WHA"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] (5/15):

"How long can the U.N. World Health Organization (WHO) continue to hold out against membership for Taiwan -- or Chinese Taipei, or the Republic of China, for that matter -- home to 23 million people. This question is posed to not just the WHO but also leaders of the People's Republic of China, who claim Taiwan as their own. ... The U.S. has made it clear that it does not support Taiwan's bid for full membership, but will continue to push for Taiwan becoming an observer in the WHA, and to have 'meaningful participation' in WHO-related technical discussion. ... Taiwan has cited the case of the former East Germany, whose status as a 'country' was challenged when it applied for membership in 1968, but the request was nonetheless included on the WHA agenda. East Germany was invited to participate in the 1972 WHA gathering as an observer, and a year later it was admitted as a full member. ..."

C) "WHO Bid Begins Public Diplomacy Contest with PRC"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (5/15):

"The new drive launched by President Chen Shui-bian and the Democratic Progressive party government to apply directly for membership in the World Health Organization in Geneva under the name of 'Taiwan' has succeeded in pulling the authoritarian People's Republic of China into open and direct competition with 'democratic Taiwan' in the arena of public diplomacy. ... The new gambit has sparked concern that a direct application could alienate the U.S., Japan and members of the EU who supported moves for 'significant participation' given the specter of alleged 'agenda' of the Taiwan president of promoting 'legal independence.' ..."

"The strategic point behind an application for membership is to force the WHO Secretariat and the World Health Assembly, under the WHO Constitution and the WHA by-laws, to respond directly to the issue and turn the matter to discussion by all member states and to expose the secret diplomacy of the WHO Secretariat and the authoritarian government to sell out not only the health rights of our people but also endanger the health rights of the rest of global society for the sake of Beijing's revanchism. Naturally, the prospects for Taiwan's affiliation to the WHA or WHO will not immediately improve due to this gambit, but they can hardly be worsened since the main obstacle is the PRC itself. ..."

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